9-15 July 1973

The march from La Bassée
sector to Somme
Cloudsell
'groundswell of a sacramental
and Catholic nature'
Winnold Down & march to
Southampton
writing of I.P. – 'reportage' etc
Tom B. mysticism – 'mystic's
fiction.'
Johnstone & rejects notion of applying
Passion in some special way to the
sufferings of warfare.
Wilfrid Owen – 'astonishing tour
de force but none the less don't
like the analogy

This for
wrong matter
of overthinking

(✓ p 9 in particular)

(Tom B's water-diving
rod. – p.12)

X p.16 – the good Bridget as a child
p.18–20 'first signs of a mars'

p 21-2 'perfectly good chocolate',
Brigadier-general Pryce-Davies V.C.
& Harry Cook, Leslie
Poulter, & beavers

(I.P. p. 173)

p15 Leslie Poulter = Olivier (I.P. 139
etc)
Slowboy p 13

Calvary Nursing Home
Sudbury Hill
Harrow-on-the-Hill
Middlesex
July 9th to July 13th 1973

Dearest René

I think I must owe you at least six letters, please forgive my failure to answer your many & most valued letters — I'm always so delighted to see your handwriting on an envelope. The cause of my silence is not ~~for~~ because of my not thinking about you, but that I seem unable to cope with correspondence & the time leaps on & letters that should have answered last Christmas remain un-dealt with & now its July — & July 9th moreover. Since July 1st my thoughts have continuously returned to what I was doing in illo tempore 57 years ago. I could not remember with any exactitude where we were on any given day — on that southward trek from the ~~[illegible]~~ La Bassée front to the chalk lands of the Somme area, but each day reveille* was very early so as to march as far as possible in the less hot part of the day. With those who had gone sick because of blistered feet, starting earlier still — there was no other way for there were no vehicles available for hobbling men. But to-day July 9th we ~~were~~ had somehow arrived & were in the field of ~~bivouac~~ bivouac I suppose, as described in Part 6 of I.P. Tomorrow July 10th between 3 AM & 4 AM we were ~~[illegible]~~ in the western slope of the 'high embankment'* of page 154 of I.P. when 'Colonel Dell presents to welcome' one of his old friends from Poona days. This letter is mainly to say how sorry I am that you should be put to all this trouble in writing your piece about my

3.30
about ~~8~~ A.M
as far as I can
recall.

I've not read this rubbish through properly but want to get it posted.
It deals only with I.P. whereas The Anathemata is in my view the one that matters.
By the way there are a number of errata on that page 66 in I.P. apart from marten-cat.
presented ~~[illegible]~~ is meant to be 'proscribed'
& 'nuts in may', 'Knots of may'.
Dai.

* Called on English trench Maps 'Queen's Nullah' very appropriate ~~for~~ a name for the C.O. & his friend to chat a while of their days in India.

work for that Welsh monograph. I'm naturally pleased that they Meic Stephens & (can't remember his name) should have asked you to do it. They wrote to me asking who I would like to write the thing and I replied, well, if possible either Saunders Lewis or yourself. But that I felt it perhaps not very fair on Saunders as he has not at all well of late and is nearly eighty. ~~and that~~ Anyway, they chose you – so it's really my fault. But what I wanted to say in this letter having got yr last one about what that extremely nice Canadian Tom Dilworth, who came to see me earlier this year with Bill Blissett, who is a professor of English at the University of Toronto & whom I have known for many years now. & who wrote a thing in that same issue as that of Tom Dilworth's piece, & in the same University periodical a year or more back wrote an article called Himself at the Cave mouth about my stuff & I thought awfully perceptive. Anyway I still haven't got to what I wanted to say to you, dear René. I'm awfully glad that you liked Tom Dilworth's piece. But while I thought it a remarkable commentary on the text & an astonishing grasp of the underlying stuff, allusions of all sorts relating to the Xtian μῦθος, he makes it seem as though ~~these~~ allusions, trends of thought, were somehow more conscious & deliberate than, in fact, they were when I was engaged in struggling to discover how best I might contrive to 'make in words' what a decade or so previously I experienced in flesh & blood. It would be most ungracious in me to say this to him, after his serious, sympathetic, scholarly & deep examination of the blasted book. Moreover what he detects in the stuff may well be demonstrably true. Being brought up in the protestant tradition of the Bible with a decided undercurrent or ground-swell of a sacramental* and Catholic nature it would be fairly certain that when, in 1928 at Portslade in Sussex I began to find out for myself ~~what~~ in what way the making of a writing presented ~~the~~ the problems of 'form' & 'content' as compared with

I'll try to say more of what I mean by that later in this letter

③

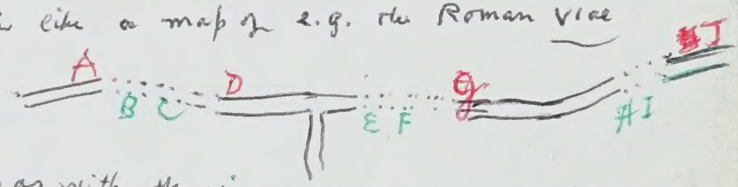
those same problems that I had every reason to know constituted the main, or rather the whole, problem in the visual arts. I began what ultimately came to be I.P. with no other idea than to find out in what fashion these problems of 'form' & 'content' cropped up in this totally different media of written words. It's hard to make chaps believe this, because they can't seem to see that this business of making a thing inevitably involves this marriage of 'form' & 'content' no matter whether the thing made is a painting or some other visual artwork. ~~must~~ So also it must crop up in making a writing. They tend to say, well, you may have been previous to 1928 entirely ~~[illegible]~~ concerned ~~with~~ with the visual arts, but you must have read a fair amount of stuff ~~at~~ the same time. That may be true enough*, but a bloke may spend hours, months, years looking at visual ~~art~~ works of all sorts — from the marvel of Irish metal work of the 7th Century or an astounding illuminated ~~[illegible]~~ Irish MSS ~~or~~ ~~[illegible]~~ to get poles apart, some Kouros or Parthenos of Hellenic Antiquity, but let him try to make an object of twisted gold or script on vellum & he'll soon find he's up against this matter of 'form' & 'content'. And the only possible way is to ~~[illegible]~~ have a crack at making some confounded thing with your own hands. For me, in the case of my first attempts at making a writing, it was much the same, only the other way round. I began, as far as I can remember, with making a drawing & writing some stuff to go with it. But soon gave up that idea & got emmersed ~~[illegible]~~ in the difficulties ~~[illegible]~~ inherent in the writing. I at first tried hard to recall a specific day — the day very early in the morning when we paraded ~~on~~ our camp parade ground ~~[illegible]~~ on a hill outside Winchester* ~~and~~ then found I could remember quite a bit about the march in the drenching rain to ~~[illegible]~~ Southampton. & waiting in some sort of very large shed ~~&~~ embarking ~~[illegible]~~

* but even if true ~~but~~ it misses the point.

Winnal Down I think it is called.

④

~~[illegible]~~ – in the drizzle ~~for~~ in the vessel that took us to the Mouth of the Seine. It was by painfully trying to remember some specific thing or event or what not in chronological order backwards ~~[illegible]~~ (not ~~[illegible]~~ *necessarily* sticking to that chronology) that I found things slowly came to mind – for example, the sodden field & our first billets in France as described in the opening pages of Part 2. ~~[illegible]~~ Part 2 is practically straight 'reportage' – we were there ~~of~~ for about a fortnight or over. I have no maps, damnation! with me here, or I could point out with some exactitude just where we were – near a place not far south from G.H.Q. at St Omer (?) the nearest town was called Warnes – can't spell it – but apart from my hopeless ~~[illegible]~~ inability to spell anything – it was a name that did not seem French, as with various other place-names in that borderland where France & Belgium meet. Anyway it was *something* like Warns & the various platoons & Companies of the Battalion had billets pretty far apart. The B.E.F. or anyway the rank & file of course, pronounced it without hesitation, as 'warnes' in, say, "that dog of his warnes 'em off." Anyway gradually by getting a clear picture of some given situation I could then recall ~~another~~ another a bit further back or rather further forward and slowly by trying to call what happened at such & such a time, was able to join the established points, but of course it was rather like a map of e.g. the Roman *viae* in Britain



because, as with the *viae* I know the exact alignment must have been from point 'A' to pick up at point 'D' but could not recall with any precision anything much of 'B' & 'C.' etc. ~~The~~ Parts 3 & 4 of *I.P.* are virtually ~~a~~ a pretty exact chronicle, Part 5 ~~[illegible]~~ uses remembered things as *materia poetica* covering a number of months from say January 1916 to May or June 1916. All is of events in the same sector ~~but~~ & the routine was repeated but we sometimes would be in one part of that sector – say in the Richebourg* – Neuve Chapelle bit or in the bit south of that; ~~[illegible]~~ in the Givenchy area that never to be forgot place of a tangle of trenches, ~~[illegible]~~ so close were ~~[illegible]~~ his trenches to ~~[illegible]~~ ours ~~[illegible]~~

Richebourg l'Avoué

There were two Richebourgs. One Richebourg St Vaast, just bit behind our lines a ghastly place: the other Richebourg 'of the Vow'* & that was a *total ruin* being literally in the front line south of Neuve Chapelle

there is a church in London I mean an old one, dedicated to him.

Can't ~~[illegible]~~ remember its' French form but I think it is written in the map in the hard-back edn of I.P. – in the extreme left bottom corner.

ours ~~in places~~ and in places not only close, but seemed to be intermeddled with each other. I have never seen an aerial photograph of the place, but that is what it felt like. No fires by day because of smoke being seen & no fires by ~~day~~ night because of the gleam giving the position away ~~there~~ at least ~~where~~ were the orders but somehow or other we managed & so most certainly did he. Occasionally some idiot would discharge a rifle-grenade which always meant retaliation most likely ~~of~~ from a light trench-mortar. The 'no-man's land' between the opposed forces ~~or~~ was, in places a solid ~~tangle~~ briary brake of red rusted entanglements of wire. The place was also undermined & counter ~~[illegible]~~ mined. ~~The counter mines~~

"The ~~[illegible]~~ concavities ~~[illegible]~~ of it is not sufficient for look you the adversary ... is digt himself four ~~yard~~ yard under the countermines: by Cheshu, I think a' will plow up all, if there is not better directions."

It was from the bit of frontage that when we were relieved we came back ~~on~~ along the tow-path of a canal that marked the line of division between the Givenchy sector & that of ~~Cuin~~ Cuinchy which was equally horrible, I'm told. Anyway no wonder I speak with affection of Green 'Gorre of the sheltering coppice' – It was a strange little place with some kind of dredging machinery – but for some unknown reason never shelled ~~though~~ it was ~~[illegible]~~ within easy range of Jerry's guns. I find I say in I.P. "when you come from the Islands" here 'Islands' refer to separate posts a bit north of Givenchy – on the Festubert front, 'Festering Hubert' in our lingo. Anyway Part 5 ~~had~~ nothing in it that was not actually experienced, but unlike unlike most of the other parts telescopes the routine of going into the ~~line~~ front line & reserve line & occasional periods in the Forward Reserve Area ~~[illegible]~~ – Divisional Baths, etc. Alice & the aged Jacques in their estaminet – Jacques to sip his coffee as he had done since the 'Fall of the Commune'. Here I think I got hold of the wrong end of the stick, for in my Greig

In I.P. p.116
Guinchy
is I think wrong,
it should be
Cuinchy

⑥

experience of the French of that part of France anyway, the Jacques were the anti-clericals and the women who tended to mind the Pastorals & go to Mass. I'm sorry I made the figure of Jacques out of type. seeing that in my sort of stuff I deal almost only with the typic.

But I've still not said anything to you ~~that~~ of what I wanted to say, touching this business of the detailed findings made by that admirable, deeply sympathetic ~~about~~ my work, & himself of very considerable ~~[illegible]~~ understanding, Tom Dilworth, I certainly think he is ~~[illegible]~~ right in saying I am not a mystic—though I dont really know what a 'mystic' is. I know it is a term used ~~[illegible]~~ with reference to blokes like John of the Cross or Teresa of Avilla at one end of the scales & is also applied to Blake and numerous ~~[illegible]~~ chaps of very differing sorts. But I dont know ~~its~~ precise meaning. I know there is a branch of Theology called 'Mystical Theology' as distinct from 'Moral Theology', ~~&~~ 'Dogmatic Theology' & 'Pastoral Theology' and that in Antiquity it appears to refer to chaps who had been initiated into certain mysteries, such as the ~~Elus~~ ~~Eleusinia~~ Eleusinian & other Mysteries. Well that's pretty plain sailing* — I mean the divisions in ~~the~~ Theology and the Greek mysteries.

*I mean that both the divisions of the theologians, even if they appear arbitrary & even if one is a bit hazy as to ~~[illegible]~~ the border line between the four, one can see the distinction and equally or indeed with greater ease one can see that for Antiquity an initiate into one or other of the Mysteries was a mystic. & that was that.

But it would seem that a mystic was a chap who had ~~[illegible]~~ a direct apperception of God in some sense, ~~[illegible]~~ by contemplation attain a unity with the Creator — but the word 'mystic' has become used ~~in~~ so many differing ways as to have only the vaguest of meanings, ~~like the word 'myth' it~~. Not, indeed quite as bad as the word 'myth', for that is about the limit in loss of meaning. The Shorter Ox. Eng. Dict. 1936 edition ~~what~~: the only Dict. I have here, starts off ~~start~~ in defining 'myth' as (1) ~~a fictitious~~ ~~narrative~~ 'a purely fictitious narrative' a bloody lie in fact.

(7)

sheet 7 & I still have ~~not~~ said what I wanted to say
which really amounts to little more than I think ~~[illegible]~~
you have a pretty good idea of my 'thinkage'
& in the articles you ~~have~~ have from time to time been good
enough to write about my stuff – for example in that
piece called 'D.J. A Reconnaissance ~~Reconnaise~~ in Agenda 1967
previously published I think in a periodical, was it
The Changing World I can't remember. & there was
one you made for The Studio about my retrospective
exhibition at Tate in 1954 I think. But anyway
the Reconnaissance piece I liked especially.
& much it ended sergeant, that shall serve for mess
quotes from last words of The Tribune's Visitation
a piece that I like especially.
But there is one thing I would like to
say which is bloody hard to say without
giving a false ~~[illegible]~~ idea.
The book on English poetry of the 1st World War
by ~~[illegible]~~ Professor John H. Johnstone was
I thought, ~~very~~ good & perceptive in his
chapter on my work – we had a fairly
extensive exchange of letters when he
was writing the piece or getting the
material together. He sounded an
awfully nice chap and like most of
those students & scholars from over
the gannets' bath, whether in the States
or in Canada, prepared to take endless
trouble & unflagging energy once they
get down to a job. He, Professor Johnstone, is a
Catholic & was a soldier in World War II
but I felt the part of his chapter
toward the end (I think) where there is
expressed something to the effect
that the Xtian soldier differed
from pre-Xtian soldiers, in that
~~they endured~~ their endurance
was in some way different from
that of ~~the~~ fighting men of
pre-Xtian times in that their
maims & ~~[illegible]~~ miseries could
be, in some sense, felt as part
of ~~[illegible]~~ those agonies of
~~[illegible]~~ God Incarnate.
I don't much like this
particular idea. Or rather I don't think ~~[illegible]~~
the sufferings of the Passion has ~~[illegible]~~ application in some special
way to the sufferings of
warfare. It is an embarrassing

matter to speak of even in a personal letter to an intimate & beloved friend of full understanding – as in the present case. We are all aware of St Paul's words about the sufferings of Xtians making full whatever was lacking in the sufferings of our Lord, and we interpret these words in various ways. And I suppose commentators and exergetical writings, Catholic & protestant, are very extensive indeed on the seemingly paradoxical assertion. Like so much in the deposits of the Xtian Μυθος we instinctively know what is meant but find it difficult to 'explain'. As with all decent *poiesis* it becomes 'difficult' only when in prose form an explanation is attempted. You quote a piece from a Wilfred Owen letter, What astonishes me about Owen whose poems I been familiar with only in recent years is how on earth he ~~wrote~~ was able to write them while he was actually in the trenches it was an astonishing achievement – I cant imagine how it was done, – a unique & marvellous detachment – but I dont like his identification of the grimly circumstances and maims & 'dole trist & tene' with the Passion of the Incarnate Logos – yes the bit you quote from the letter is, an astonishing *tour de force*, as you say, 'terrific'. But, I none the less, dont like the analogy. – the very consciously stated analogy. Its ~~brilliant~~ brilliant artistry & skill & plain stating, factualness down to the right way to tie the leather thongs of Field Service boots do not, for me, at all events, justify what I think is the ~~bad theology~~ the unfortunate theology ~~implied~~, well, more than implied, but quite explicit.

It may be, indeed it may well be, that Owen (*lux perpetua luceat ei*) was of so sincere a believer in that ~~partic~~ particular tradition of 'Christ crucified' that has been from its beginnings, as far as Wales is concern'd in the first quarter of the 18th Century ~~to~~ its height in the middle or latter part of the 19th Cent, *the* religion of protestant Wales, for though Owen was born & nourished in the English Low Church tradition of the English shires bordering the Welsh lands and I dont think he ever spoke of this Welsh ancestry in his poetry, but he may well have inherited much of the same religion of Bryn Calfaria, whereby, if he did, he might well however unconsciously, quite naturally as an infantry officer see in all the mutilation & death an image of the immolated *geong hæleð þæt wæs God ælmihtig* of the AS. 'Dream of the Rood.' perhaps it may even have made it possible for him to write those poems when actually in action. And it may very well have caused him to write, under such immediate ~~[illegible]~~ pressure of that 'old lie' to rhyme with '*pro patria mori*', whereas had he not himself become one ~~[illegible]~~ with those fallen, but had survived to ~~write~~ consider 'in tranquility' ~~he~~ he *might* have hesitated and seen that there was no 'old lie', but something more akin to Isaias' *non est species neque decor et vidimus eum et non erat aspectus.*

However that may be, I again have meandered, for I merely wished to indicate that in writing *In Paren* I had no intention whatever in presuming to compare the varied maims, death-strokes, miseries, acts of courage etc. of the two contending forces, ours ~~&~~ or those against whom we found ourselves by 'misadventure' with the Passion, self-Oblation & subsequent Immolation & death of the Cult-hero of our Xtian tradition. For that is a unique & profound Mystery of Faith. He, by whom all things are that are, Deum de Deo, Deum ~~[illegible]~~ verum de Deo vero, 'places himself in the Order of signs' and under the *signum* of actual real, substantial, mortal flesh, of the flesh of Mair, the *fiat*-giver, *Ceidwades Wen* et Mundi Domina in Liknites cave was seen of the herdmen strictly wrapped in swaddlings *in praesepio* and over thirty years later with his chosen *turba* seated, himself the Offerant & the victim, made the Olation that committed him inescapably to the bloody Immolation at the hands of others. If this is not wholly a mysterium and a true mythos, what could it be? This is mainly why I hate those theologians who seek to 'de-mythologize' the Xtian deposits. In a certain sense the Icelandic writings of one part of the Nordic Eddas puts the matter so directly that one is forced to come face to face with the mysterium: 'I know that I hung on the rootless tree for ~~the~~ nine whole nights,

wounded with the spear, sacrificed to Odin,

Myself to myself'.

This is believed to have been influenced by Xtian concepts, but others argue that there is reason to think of it as if not indigenous, there were early contacts with Mesopotamian ideas, it hardly matters for the Xtian dogma is that the Word made Flesh is Deum verum de Deo vero hence in his Passion, he oblated Himself to Himself. Ex patre natum, Filium Dei Unigenitum does nothing in any way to lessen the Godhead of the mewling babe in the oxen stall or the hanged man swinging from the statera-beam of the stauros. But curiously enough, ~~the~~ curiously, words 'Son of God' appear to have lessened the sense that it was the Divinity ~~that~~ was oblated to the Divinity at the Abendmahl, the same that, without the wall, was Immolated ~~by~~ an execution-party, the speculatores detailed ~~for that~~ job. And the same that under the signa of Bread & Wine is paid latria at any mensa where the anamnesis is made. But while that is explicit dogma of ~~the~~ ecclesia yet chances ~~that~~ the Nordic Edda's 'Myself to myself'-forces the reader in a more stark fashion to see the implications.

Certain

speculatores

can't find the word used in that particular sense in Lewis & Short. who give it as referring to chaps sent out on a special duty; as scouts or reconnaissance parties also as special adjutants or messengers and body-guards to a general. But some years back, I think in Stuart Jones' Companion to Roman Hist. I pretty sure the word was used of special chaps in charge of execution-parties.

God! sheet ⑪ & still not explained what I mean.

I think that all our miseries & suffering can be seen as in some way part of the whole anabasis and passion of the figure without whom our Western 'Culture' could not have been. For cult-men obviously preceed a culture and it is as obvious that the central rite of our 'culture' was the sacrifice for the living & the dead made by the men of the order of Melchisedec and that there emerged from that true 'culture' the thing called Western 'Civilization'. And that whether we like it or not we are men of that civilization in a very late phase. The speed of the changing world & that incredible acceleration itself is I think indicative of the lateness & also makes us feel lost & bewildered.

If we are ~~[illegible]~~ within the ~~[illegible]~~ tradition of the ~~[illegible]~~ Xtian Culture ~~we~~ it is proposed for our acceptance that sometime in the Imperatorship of Caesar Augustus, ~~that~~ is now about ~~[illegible]~~. the year ~~[illegible]~~ seven or maybe six previous to the conventional date of B.C. I.* a supra ~~mundane~~ natural happening penetrated our mundane history, whereby ~~[illegible]~~ about the time that an imperial decree calling for a census of the various provinces ~~[illegible]~~ under Roman jurisdiction, – *ut describeretur universus orbis*, – was gradually made operative, in some provinces sooner than others; anyway some ~~ye~~ few years before Herod the Great had died at Jericho in B.C. 4. – Tertullian says that ~~[illegible]~~ Sentius Saturninus the Legate of Syria for BC 9 to BC 6 followed by Quintilius Varus, Legate for 6 to 4 B.C. There is some doubt as to his successor but ~~[illegible]~~ Quirenius ~~[illegible]~~ according to some was legate for ~~[illegible]~~ BC. 3 to 2 it could have been he who re-continued the Census. But Josephus says that Quirenius was Legate of Syria in BC 6, which, if true, would correspond with the Incarnation as related by St Luke, Cap 2, 'when Cyrenius (Quirenius) was governor of Syria.' Judea was not a procuratorship ~~[illegible]~~ of the Imperial province of Syria until ~~[illegible]~~ some date early in ~~[illegible]~~ the 1st Century of our ~~era~~ Era. Pilate was procurator for AD. 26 to 36 & he ~~[illegible]~~ succeeded a Valerius Gratus, who held the office for AD 15 to 26.

* It is known how the error occurred; by same chap (I've forgotten the name) making a mistake in calculation. ~~[illegible]~~ But the Incarnation date is not known with absolute precision but was most probably ~~[illegible]~~ some six or seven years earlier.

There was a man named Coponius as procurator for A.D. 6 to 8 but if he was the first to hold that impossible post there must have been others between him and Pilate & of course others after Pilate's recall to Rome in 36. AD

More meandering! What I want to say is that I dont think the soldiers involved in what I describe in I.P. were any different vis-a-vis the ~~suffering~~ salvific suffering of Christ from any other soldiers of any time you like to name. That I ~~[illegible]~~ fairly continuously use language & employ analogies & allusions inseparable from the Xtian tradition of the West whether it evokes some familiar words of the Scriptures of the Old or New testaments or from Malory or early Welsh Celtic ~~or~~ Irish Celtic or Middle English or later materia ~~is~~ is inevitable for what little I know or have assimilated through this channel or that is all I have in my make-up — ~~[illegible]~~ had I been nurtured in some other complex of tradition & belief the writing would necessarily ~~have~~ to draw upon materia ~~[illegible]~~ very other. But as the blasted thing was wholly conditioned in both form & content from what I had known as a child or from what I learned as an art-student or from yourself or Tiger Dawson or Herman and so on, how could it have been other in its ingredients than it is? So while I think the analysis of passages by the admirable Canadian scholar (who is training for the Catholic priesthood) to be of ~~[illegible]~~ great perception & astonishing in quickly observing the allusion here to some passage in the ~~Xtian~~ Biblical deposits or there to some other matter of form within the Catholic culture is true enough, and I feel grateful to him for using his water-diviner's rod with such accuracy, ~~[illegible]~~ To take but one example where he notes that passage when the corporal is doling out rations, including the rum ration ~~[illegible]~~ pp 73-74.

~~O, dont jog his hand ministering~~,
Come off it Moses — dole out the issue
Dispense salvation,
strictly apportion it,
let us taste & see.
let us be renewed
for Christ' sake let us be warm
O have a care — dont spill the precious
O, dont jog his hand ~~[illegible]~~ ministering
do take care.
O please — give the poor bugger elbow room.
~~Would you ever seen such a thing~~
~~The — you bloody — believe it — some old~~
Then — what did I tell you — can you beat it have you ever seen such a thing in yr life, wouldn't you bloody-believe it — it some old ~~[illegible]~~ fetch you through their bellies proper hobbledehoys.

Is this the blest cruse at Zarephath that you should make
so free with.

Not by a long chalk . . . .

Each one in turn, & humbly, receives his meagre benefit. This is
Lance-jack sustains them from his iron spoon; and this is
thank-worthy.
Some of them croak involuntary as the spirit's potency gets
the throat at unawares ~~[illegible]~~.
Each one turns silently, carrying with careful ~~[illegible]~~ fingers
their own daily bread . . . You could eat out of their
hands.
There was an attempt with tea & sugar. There was fumbling
with fire & water and watched-pot.
Full of trench damp fire, full of fire spent water,
~~there are~~
too many hands to save the boil.
Slow-boy laid hold of calcined dixie-handle — but made
him hop — laugh — why, you'd laugh at Fanny."

Bill Blissett
& Tom Dilworth
have been ~~instrumental~~
instrumental in making
my stuff known in
~~[illegible]~~ Canada
& really get down
to the task of
examining the books
line by line. Much
of our university
folk in the States
but in Canada
people have
been much
inclined to
take this interest
unlike people
in this Island.

Well, he, Tom D., was quite right in seeing that
~~the episode [illegible]~~ the words recalled the
the cruse of oil ~~by~~ a widow at Zarephath &
Elisha's (or was it Elijah) ~~[illegible]~~. miraculous action
in regard to it — (it's so infuriating not having
a Cruden's Concordance with me here for it means
endless futile search in the O.T. and takes hours &
hours.) & he's right in seeing that the whole
episode of doling out the rations is told ~~[illegible]~~ in
such a way that betrays the author's unconscious
use of terms such as "and this is thank-worthy" &
("carrying with ~~[illegible]~~) careful fingers their own daily ~~bread~~ bread"
But only very remotely did I think
of altar sacral distribution, I was merely
recalling a vivid remembrance of an often repeated
scene & the very positive protests if it looked
as though some over-anxious jolting might
spill the small-enough ration. I can see
the longish iron ladle now which was used
sometimes when there was ~~a~~ a poor issue
Usually we were allowed to have the stuff
put into our own mess tin covers.

I like the bit beginning "Full of trench
damp fire" ~~&~~ ending with "laugh, you'd
laugh at Fanny" 'Slow-boy' I think
I must have got long subsequently, from
yourself, but I can't recall in that
connection. — was it part of that
jokko about 'put on the kettle anyway
said little Ethel"? ~~[illegible]~~ it fitted
perfectly with that lanky corporal
with his 'longe ladel' of Chaucer's Cooke

ybrent for al his longe dadel' or however it's spelt in the original.

Still not come to the bloody point, but may be I've said enough in this confounded meander for you to understand what I mean. To wit I've no criticism of what an analysis yields in the hands of ~~[illegible]~~ such as Tom D. providing it is understood that in the main the writer wrote it ~~not~~ ~~unconscious of the~~ necessarily consciously intending to evoke this or that source ~~unconscious of what it might evoke~~, but much more because they were within his 'word hoard' and seemed the only way, given the changing mood of the content, to make the form he wished.

It might be worth saying that more than one critic have said that in In Parenthesis the writer has superimposed a ~~[illegible]~~ a kind of attitude of mind not only ~~is~~ foreign to the actualities of the infantry war of 1914-18, but ~~[illegible]~~ transferred from ~~1928~~ his own ~~own~~ feelings & ideas of 1928 when the book was began back to his own actual ~~feel~~ outlook & feelings of ~~1914~~ the period of the war itself. One such critic has said that it must be remembered that Mr Jones was not received into the Catholic Church until ~~1922. So that~~ after the conclusion of the War, so that his liturgical references & modes of thought ~~must must be~~ cannot be those of the events he was describing ~~and~~ are, to that extent, unreal. While it is not for me to make an Apologia pro Vita Sua I think it reasonable, for the truth's sake, to say that while I was brought in the Low Church tradition of the Church of England & on joining the Royal Welch ~~Fusilier~~ Fusiliers in Jan. 1915 gave my religion as C. of E., by 1917 ~~[illegible]~~ I became aware of ~~[illegible] of the tradition of the Catholic Church~~ the Catholic tradition and knew that sooner or later I should, I hoped, seek formal admission into the Catholic Church. I realized that, though I had read scarcely any writings concerning the Sacraments, my whole inward attitude had been of a sacramental nature. The day by day life of a private soldier ~~tended to~~ did not on the whole tend to the making of fundamental decisions of such a nature.

There was little time to think. at all except of immediate affairs of a mundane nature. ~~How~~ how best to avoid such & such a fatigue how not to get on the wrong side of Sergeant Major X ~~and~~ so on. Not ~~that~~ I can complain of the N.C.Os of my unit.. In fact I marvel how I escaped getting into trouble For I was by no means ~~an~~ exemplary ~~a~~ parade soldier— ~~I~~ was much more at ease in the ~~[illegible]~~ actual routine of the trenches. where, in fact, ~~there~~ was, ~~[illegible]~~ so it seemed to me, ~~the~~ a much more relaxed relationship between 'the men' & N.C.Os & those of commissioned rank. It was something of that I had in mind in ~~the~~ a round about way on ~~[illegible] In Parenthesis~~ bottom paragraph of page 27 & ~~on~~ page 28 of I.P. — It was not a relaxing of discipline, for that would have been fatal, but just a more easy relationship between all ranks, Which reminds me of a mention in one of yr letters asking me if I had ever read Tolstoy's *Tales of Army Life*. Yes, I had read it & one of the few of ~~those~~ great Russian books, translations of which I had read & I remember his saying ~~that~~ 'he' & 'him' were always used ~~[illegible]~~ by soldiers of the enemy ~~and~~ thinking how little change ~~there~~ was in certain matters between Russian soldiers in 1854 & British soldiers in 1915, for I read *Tales of Army Life* after my war experiences, but I can't recall at what date. Dorothea Travis made me read another Rusky book, short stories, by, could it have been, Gorky? anyway the chaps in it seemed nearly all connected with ~~a~~ railways or small officials of some sort, ~~and~~ Leslie ~~[illegible]~~ Poulter (the 'Olivier' ~~of~~ page 139 of I.P. & maybe elsewhere) made me read ~~the~~ that book The Brothers Karamazov by DOSTOIEVSKI ~~[illegible]~~ and that's about all I've read of those authors for "that great land the Tartar harries" — (a Swinburne attempt to translate ~~[illegible]~~ a poem by Villon, because he, Swinburne, makes ~~harries~~ 'harries' rhyme with Paris 'there's no good girls lip out of Paris'

Another bloody page of digression.

To return to this matter of my Catholic thing that some critics have said I've introduced into I.P. notions imbibed ~~in~~ ~~[illegible]~~ subsequent years ~~[illegible]~~ This is a misunderstanding but which I

Cant inform them of. but which I can speak of to you. even if it a bit embarrassing ~~[illegible]~~ long before 1914, when I was at Camberwell Art school – Old Solly ('born to fail' ~~[illegible]~~ Reginald Savage of ~~[illegible]~~ canon John Grey) my attempts at 'figure composition' were nearly always of some medieval subject ~~introducing~~ introducing a vested priest & my interest in Morris's poetry & Rossetti ~~Rossetti~~ & Co. And dear old Hartrick in quite a different way ~~that~~ was a kind of oblique catholic influence or at least, if 'influence' is too strong a word, opened my mind to the European tradition. This would be in 1910 to 1914.

Much earlier still, when I was a child of I suppose about seven I recall that one Good Friday and my father had gone to what, in the Anglican Church, is called the Ante-Communion Service (that is to say the prayers of the rite of ~~Communion~~ Communion up to the Offertory Prayer & no further, because, ~~also~~ as with the Catholic Church ~~of~~ the West & the Orthodox East, the C of E never ~~[illegible]~~ consecrated the Bread & Wine on that one day in the whole year)

I can't recall where my mother was on that particular Good Friday morning or my brother & sister – & I wouldn't have been left alone in the house but all I can recall is that I was in the garden & the flower-beds had along their outward edges longish slats of light wood to keep the earth from ~~[illegible]~~ spreading over the ~~[illegible]~~ path or grass lawn or what not. I decided ~~this~~ that it would be a 'good thing' ~~to~~ ~~[illegible]~~ make a recalling of Feria VI in Passione et Morte Domini, by taking up a length of this light wooden bordering and then finding a shorter piece & nailing on or in some way fixing the two together to make ~~[illegible]~~ a cross-form, and carry it round the limited space of the garden. In the middle of ~~this~~ this child-ritual my father returned from his Ante-Communion Service – as I cannot recall with any precision what he said & do not want to ~~[illegible]~~ invent words that were never said, I can do no more than say that he was ~~[illegible]~~ much distressed that I should have disordered the flower-beds & broken one ~~[illegible]~~ piece of wooden slatting in making the cross-bar & of going into the green house to find a nail & in doing so had smashed ~~two~~ or three red earthenware flower-pots and all this on this most solemn day of the Christian year.

I can recall no more except the whiteness of his face which always was a sign of repressed anger or sorrow in him. I have a vague idea that I tried, through my tears, to say that it was because of it being Good Friday that I had done this thing.

But I fancy that had I attempted this, the true cause of my action, I should remember his answer, which I do not, so I had best leave it at his not unnatural displeasure & regret with my behaviour.

Some years later, and here again I am vague as to the details, or perhaps it would more true to say that I am reasonably clear as to the details, but altogether vague as to time and circumstances. In the church we attended it was considered papistical to kneel at the words in the Creed "and was made man". I found that something almost in the nature of a compulsion at sometime in my teens, — make me kneel if only on one knee, at these words. But as no one else in the congregation made any such gesture, and boys at all events, greatly fear being thought odd, it was a battle between what I considered was in harmony with the herdsmen from the fields of Ephrata when they in obedience to the wonder-tale of the angel came into the caved stable & saw between the patient animals the Babe & She whose womb-burden that Babe had been, and my teenage fear of acting other than was customary in that congregation. Sometimes the fear of oddity would win, sometimes the sense of bodily latria would prevail. A relative, most likely my mother, would say "Why will you make yourself conspicuous, you know perfectly well that it is not customary in this church." My answer was that I didn't think anybody would notice, but if you like I'll drop my handkerchief or something, and kneel, apparently in order to ~~put~~ pick it up, but actually because I think it right ~~[illegible]~~ ~~that~~ the words ~~[illegible]~~ demanded ~~this~~ bodily action.

This attitude of mine lay dormant for a good many years, – but I could never understand what it was in Protestantism that made it positively hostile to bodily action, – that prayer, words alone, hymns, homilies, psalm-singing were alone the means ~~whereby~~ ~~the~~ whereby ~~the~~ man could get ~~in~~ contact with God. It all seemed to me arid. But as I say above, concentration of the visual arts & then the outbreak of the First World War tended to fill my mind with other matters.

I don't know whether I ever told you of my first ~~glimpse~~ sight of a Mass. It was after the Somme, I think, so when I had returned to France from being wounded. Anyway when or where it was I can't exactly place. But as I was always cold, one of my main occupations was to hunt for any wood that was dry & ~~[illegible]~~ could be used to make a decent fire. We were in some support trenches and I said to the people I was with 'I'm going off to find some decent fire-wood.'

~~They said Well, be careful for it's a desolate bloody bit of frontage and unless you kind of bearings you're like to [illegible] lose your way back here & don't forget that [illegible] bastard Captain Vaughan, he'll be on the prowl and he knows who's been detailed to this [illegible] delectable post or any other post on the company frontage so don't be found absent when [illegible] arrives. Must chance it [illegible] with two fire [illegible] I noticed a very battered bit of what had been a farm out-house or byre of some sort~~

Just a little way back, it is between our support trench & the Reserve line, I noticed ~~[illegible]~~ what had been a farm building now a wreckage in the main, ~~[illegible]~~ owing to shell-fire. No individual of any sort was about. I noticed that one bit of this wreckage, a byre or cart house of some sort, still stood & its roofing appearing to be intact & its walling undamaged at least for a little distance. I thought now that looked to be most likely the very place where there might not only be wooden objects of one sort or another, ~~perhaps~~ broken cart-wheels, or other discarded bits of timber but, with a bit of luck, a wood-store perfectly dry & cut ready for use. So I went to investigate and when I came close to the wall I found it [illegible] there were signs of its having been a bit more knocked about than appeared from a few hundred yards away, ~~there~~ but there was no door or opening of any sort on that side. but I found a crack [illegible] against which I put my eye expecting to see either ~~dark~~ empty darkness ~~or~~ that I should have to go round to the other side of the of little building to find an entrance. But what I saw through the small gap in the wall was not the dim emptiness I had expected, but the back of a reredos in a gilt-hued planeta, two points of flickering candle light no doubt lent an extra sense of goldness to the vestment & a golden warmth, seemed, by the same agency, to ~~the~~ lend the white altar-cloths & the white linen of the celebrant's alb & amice & maniple (the latter, I notice, has been [illegible] abandoned, without a word of explanation, by these blasted reformers) You can imagine what a great marvel it was for me to see ~~seen~~ through that chink in the wall. and [illegible] kneeling in the hay beneath the improvised *mensa* were a few huddled ~~figures~~ figures in khaki.

Only a very few, for of course most of the R.W.F. were of some Nonconformist sect & the ~~[illegible]~~ Londoners mainly C. of E. But there was a big-bodied Irishman & an Italian naturalised Englishman, represented [illegible] under the ~~names of~~ forms of Bomber Mulligan & Runner [illegible] Miotti in [illegible] *In Paren.* on page 121 & Mulligan as 'Old sweat Mulligan' on page 117 & one or two others.

I can't recall at what part of the Mass it was as I ~~squinted~~ looked through that squint-hole and I didn't think I ought to stay long as it seemed rather like ~~prying on~~ an uninitiated bloke prying on the Mysteries of a cult. But it made a big impression on me. For one thing I was astonished how close to the Front Line the priest had decided to make the Oblation ~~&~~ ~~[illegible]~~ I was also impressed to see old sweat Mulligan, a somewhat fearsome figure, a real pugilistic, ~~drinking~~ hard-drinking Goidelic ~~[illegible]~~ Celt, kneeling there in the smoky candle light. ~~And~~ one strong impression I had (and this I have often ~~[illegible]~~ thought about over this last ten years of change when clerics of all sorts declare that the turning-round of the *mensa* & the use of the vernacular & much besides made the faithful more at one with the ~~[illegible]~~ sacred minister & so get back nearer to the Caena Domini) for at that spying unintentionally on the Mass in Flanders in the Forward Zone I felt immediately that oneness between the Offerant & those toughs ~~that~~ clustered round him in the ~~dimly~~ dim lit byre, a thing I had never felt remotely as a Protestant at the ~~[illegible]~~ Office of Holy Communion in spite of the insistence on Protestant ~~theory~~ theology on the 'priesthood of the laity'.

I then had to seek elsewhere for my fire-wood — ~~[illegible]~~ I can't remember what I managed to gather ~~[illegible]~~.

And another thing that puzzles me a bit is that I can't fit in this incident with any place we were in *after* The Somme in July 1916 for when I returned to ~~the [illegible] in Oct 1916~~ France ~~they~~ in Oct 1916 we were in the sector North of Ypres & remained there until Sept 1917 when we moved south to ~~[illegible]~~ the Bois Grenier Sector — that place of incredible quiet where ~~convolvulus~~ convolvuli grew ~~[illegible]~~ over the revetment frames of the Communication ~~trench~~ trenches & where a little French boy used to come up & blow a little horn of some sort to let us know he had issues of *Le Matin* — a French Newspaper that I believe no longer exists.

The sector where incidentally, we had to take the Portuguese in to the line for instruction. Been thinking about them just of late apropos Mozambique. Must stop this appallingly over long letter that has told you nothing that you didn't know before. I think you, in making this blasted thing, just put down what you personally feel & think. For I'm sure you'd get it right, as you have in the *Renaissance* piece Because you & Harman understand ~~that~~ it is the actual making of a work whether a water-colour or a writing are, for me, much the same as to this business of 'content & form'. I think my being concerned with the visual art of drawing, painting etc. from childhood until I

was just over thirty may account in part for my
feeling that above all else what matters in this
wedding of 'form' and 'content'. Literary chaps, on the whole,
incline not see this obviously. Or if they
deeply concerned with 'form' it is with some
particular metric e.g. the correctness of the sonnet form
~~or~~ with getting the exact quantities in the
syllables of an ~~hexameter~~ hexameter or what not,
O.K. but that's not quite the thing as
the form-content unity of which I am
now speaking. However that may be,
I rather fancy that having been
concerned with the visual arts for many
years before having an attempt at writing
may have conditioned my attitude &
the attitude of literary chaps toward
my work. — I don't know.
One thing I had in mind to tell you
was that in the writing of I.P.
Although it is confined to the
period Christmas 1915 to the
assault on Mametz Wood in
July 1916 I occasionally employed material
from my subsequent time in France from
Oct. 1916 to late in February or
Early March 1918. For example
in that incident sometime in
the afternoon of July 10th or about
midday when ~~the~~ some of the
Brigade Staff including Bde General
Pryce-Davies V.C. etc came up to
see how things were going. I make
one of his staff offer some chocolate
to his companion – they were young
men & immaculate in appearance.
and in I.P. I make one of them say
"I say, Calthrop, have a bite of
this perfectly good chocolate, you
can eat the stuff with your
beaver up this Jacquerie knows
quite well that organizing
brains must be adequately nourished."
~~Now~~ by pure chance I was
sufficiently close to them to hear
one say to another "I say X, have
a bit of this, ~~sandwich or whatever~~
~~he was offering~~ old man, it's
a perfectly good (sandwich)," or
whatever he was offering his friend.
And that as far as I can remember
was all I heard, but in writing

the account of the visitation of the Brigade Staff — in itself a memorable sight owing to the immaculate khaki with gorget-patches of scarlet & superbly tailored whipcord riding-breeches — not sure about scarlet ribbon round the field-service caps because they *may* have been wearing schrapnel-helmets &/or by that time all ranks were supposed ~~[illegible]~~ to wear tin hats in the battle area & Pryce-Davies was insistent in such formalities — but my memory on the contrary tells me that these young men were wearing their ~~staff caps with the~~ scarlet ~~[illegible]~~ ribbanded ~~[illegible]~~ staff caps, but my memory is probably at fault in this.

But the point is that in some other circumstances altogether, there was a bit of show-on — German shelling of some intensity ~~in or round~~ around a post or trench of some sort we were holding, & that I was a bit worried for I ~~[illegible]~~ had not seen a particular mate of ~~my~~ mine in ~~the~~ Company or Batt. ~~signals~~ signals for some hours & wondered if he was alright. Harry Cook by name, and I had reason to go quickly a bit down a communication trench where there was ~~a~~ a ~~niche~~ niche in the sand-bagged wall & in the cavity a box of S.A.A. which was now needed. And it so chanced that as I was about to carry the box of S.A.A. back to the forward ~~trench~~ trench that who should appear at the juncture of this trench with another, but Leslie Poulter! moving with *great* haste but in a direction opposite from mine or at least ~~at~~ an angle from it. I shouted ~~[illegible]~~ across the revetment, asking him as ~~loudly~~ as loudly as I could, for there was a lot of noise in the air. & what I shouted was: "Have you seen Harry?" He heard me but had no time to say more than, "I saw young Harry with his beaver on" from the First Part of Henry IV, Act 4, sc. 1. expecting me to know the passage "his cuisses on his thighs, gallantly arm'd Rise from the ground like feather'd Mercury" Well, while I did not ~~[illegible]~~ recognize the referance, I knew that Harry ~~[illegible]~~ Cooke was alive & unhurt. when Leslie had seen him a little back. Both Leslie & Harry were in ~~[illegible]~~ Batt. Signals. So I took the box of S.A.A. with a lighter heart.

When I was writing about the Bde Staff officers I thought "you can eat the stuff with your beaver up" could be legitimately transferred from Leslie's quote, to that ~~of~~ of 'the great Lords in harness.' Incidentally Leslie P. had the passage right, for 'beaver *on*' is what Shakespeare wrote — and 'beaver up' is wrong, I suppose I was thinking of 'vizor' maybe, for a 'beaver' as you know is a piece of plate-mail protecting the neck & is either 'on' or not worn at all. I suppose in writing 'beaver up' in *I.P.* I ~~was~~ thought it conveyed the idea of a ~~[illegible]~~ narrow slit through which chocolate or any other food could be easily put into the mouth.

Forgive this appalling mess — & its length & illegibility but having written it I suppose I'd best send it.

Much love to Joan, — Yours ever David